

# **The Use of Negation in Epicurean Philosophy Concepts**

**Post by “Kalosyni” of April 15, 2025 at 10:43 AM**

Today this question is on my mind, regarding the often used negation in Epicurean philosophy (which came up when thinking about the phrase; "absence of pain") ...and of which there are many many concepts presented as a negation.

And I did this search online:

how does the brain process negation in language

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AI Overview

ND +10

The brain processes negation in language by **engaging inhibitory mechanisms and modifying the meaning of words or phrases rather than simply inverting them**. Negation does not fully change the meaning of a statement, but rather weakens or mitigates it, often requiring the brain to resolve conflicting information.

Here's a more detailed explanation:

#### Inhibitory Mechanisms:

Studies suggest that negation activates inhibitory brain circuits, similar to those involved in stopping actions or suppressing impulses. This aligns with the idea that negation requires the brain to suppress the original meaning and consider an alternative.

#### Mitigation, not Inversion:

Research indicates that negation doesn't simply switch the meaning of a word (e.g., "hot" to "cold"), but rather reduces or softens its intensity. For example, when a sentence says "This coffee is not hot," the brain doesn't necessarily interpret it as "This coffee is cold," but rather as "This coffee is not as hot as expected."

#### Conflict Resolution:

Processing negation involves resolving conflicts between the original statement and its negation. The brain may initially process a negative statement in a similar way to a positive one, but then adjust the interpretation to account for the negative aspect.

#### Neurophysiological Evidence:

Studies using brain imaging techniques like fMRI and EEG have shown distinct brain activity patterns associated with negation, including changes in brain wave frequencies and activation of specific brain regions.

#### Role of the Ventral Medial Prefrontal Cortex:

Some research suggests that the ventral medial prefrontal cortex plays a role in processing negative words, potentially mediating the inhibition and conflict resolution processes.

How Does "Not" Affect What We Understand? Scientists...

May 30, 2024 — In sum, neural data matched what was observed for the...

How 'Not' Changes Everything: Brain Interprets...

May 30, 2024 — Summary: Researchers found that negating...

Brain responses to negated and affirmative meanings in...

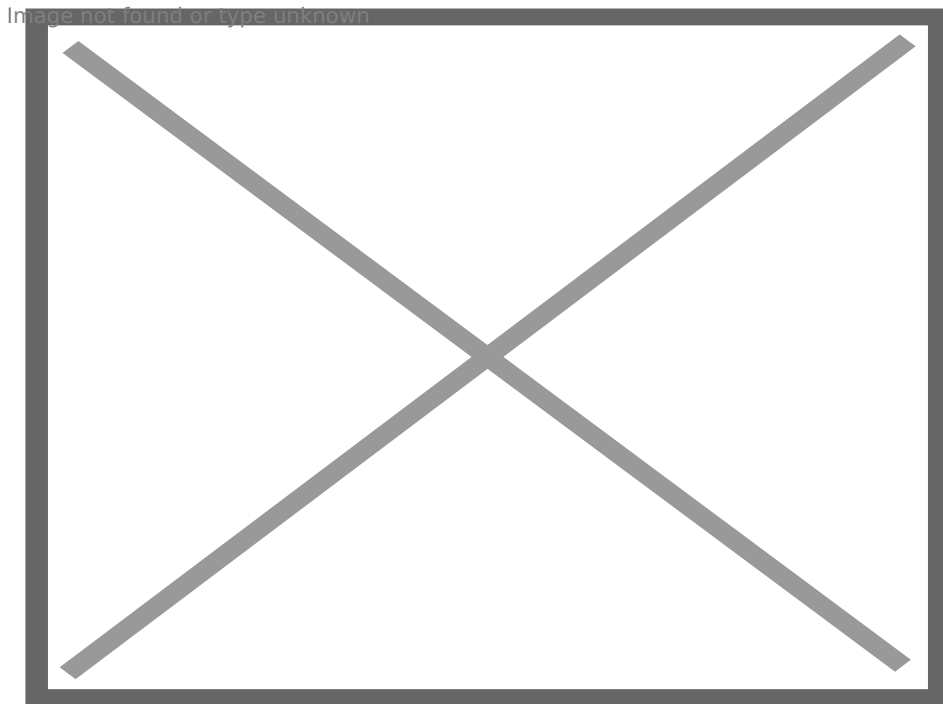
The findings suggest that the auditory processing of negated sentences is...

How do we cognate concepts framed in the negative, and can we rephrase concepts in the positive and still keep a correct representation. 🤔

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**Post by “Kalosyni” of April 15, 2025 at 12:08 PM**

Here is a further article:



[How Does “Not” Affect What We Understand? Scientists Find Negation Mitigates Our Interpretation of Phrases](#)

New study shows how the brain builds new meanings through word combinations  
[www.nyu.edu](http://www.nyu.edu)

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**Post by “Rolf” of April 15, 2025 at 12:14 PM**

Thinking aloud here.

"This is not pleasurable" gives me a notably different impression than "this is painful". "This is not pleasurable" brings to my mind some sort of neutral middleground, which as we know does not exist under the Epicurean framework. Perhaps this explains why people get so hung up on "absence of pain" implying some sort of ascetic nirvana-esque state. Not because of unclearness on Epicurus' part, but because they don't know or don't understand the idea that there is *only* pleasure and pain, and the way the brain processes negation points them to this non-existent "neutral third state".

Interesting thread!

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### **Post by “Kalosyni” of April 15, 2025 at 12:29 PM**

[Don](#) any thoughts on this? Maybe you have something to add about the use of negation in ancient Greek language, and the pattern of words that often occurs? Could we translate to a "positive" framing (and phrasing) without losing anything? ...And it seems we could only do so if we were translating directly from ancient Greek source texts.

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### **Post by “Rolf” of April 16, 2025 at 5:35 AM**

I thought about this some more, particularly Homer's use of negation to imply the greatest degree of something. The word "spotless" came to mind.

"The table is clean" = Sure, it's clean.

"The table is spotless (without 'spots')" = Wow, that is one clean table. The pinnacle of cleanliness.

Thus, "absence of pain" is to "spotless" as "pleasure" is to "clean".

Spotless and clean refer to the same thing - being free from dirt - but the negative form, spotless, implies the highest degree of cleanliness.

Likewise, "absence of pain" and "pleasure" mean the same thing (considering *only* pleasure and pain exist), but the negative form, "absence of pain", implies the highest degree of pleasure.

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## Post by “Rolf” of April 16, 2025 at 5:54 AM

In order to illustrate this use of language, I've rewritten the contentious portion of Menoecus 131 as if it regarded cleanliness rather than pleasure:

*When, therefore, we maintain that cleanliness is the end, we do not mean the cleanliness of lazy teenagers — those who mask grime with body spray or shove messes under the bed — as is supposed by some who are either ignorant or disagree with us or do not understand, but rather the absence of filth on the body and of clutter in the home — in other words, spotlessness.*

Humorous as this may be, I hope it is helpful in pointing out the effect of linguistic negation. 😄

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## Post by “Kalosyni” of April 16, 2025 at 7:57 AM

Thank you [Rolf](#) and that section of Letter to Menoecus could also be a kind of rebuttal to perhaps the Cyrenaics. Also it enables a compare and contrast between two states. And it increases the sense of meaning conveyed when thinking through what is being said.

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## Post by “Patrikios” of April 19, 2025 at 3:05 PM

### [Quote from Rolf](#)

Likewise, “absence of pain” and “pleasure” mean the same thing (considering only pleasure and pain exist), but the negative form, “absence of pain”, implies the highest degree of pleasure.

[Rolf](#), thanks for this thoughtful perspective. I understand the “spotless” analogy.

I'm wondering whether “**absence of pain**”, **implies the highest degree of pleasure** fits for all persons. Couldn't the “**absence of pain**” lead one to simply be in a relaxed, neutral state; with **highest degree of pleasure** coming from a favorite kinetic pleasure?

I may be missing something in the way you described the analogy.

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## Post by “Rolf” of April 19, 2025 at 4:13 PM

[Quote from Patrikios](#)

[Quote from Rolf](#)

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[Rolf](#) , thanks for this thoughtful perspective. I understand the “spotless” analogy.

I’m wondering whether “**absence of pain**”, **implies the highest degree of pleasure** fits for all persons. Couldn’t the “**absence of pain**” lead one to simply be in a relaxed, neutral state; with **highest degree of pleasure** coming from a favorite kinetic pleasure?

I may be missing something in the way you described the analogy.

This is something I’m still wrapping my head around, so I might not be the best person to ask. That said, according to epicurean philosophy there is no “neutral state”. There is only pleasure and pain. So a complete absence of pain indicates a complete presence of pleasure. The way I understand it, this “absence of pain” is more of an ideal state, a goal, rather than something that we are realistically going to achieve. As far as I’m aware, you could switch out “absence of pain” here with “100% pleasure” and it would mean the same thing. “Absence of pain” is just used to emphasise the completeness of pleasure we should strive for.

I suppose such an ideal state could present itself as a relaxed and tranquil state, but it could just as easily be a moment of ecstatic joy and laughter with friends. Epicurus wasn’t talking about some state of perfect pleasure that lasts forever once achieved, like nirvana or something. Instead, our pleasure and pain levels are constantly fluctuating.

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## Post by “Cassius” of April 19, 2025 at 6:33 PM

I think Rolfe is right in picking out any reference to a "neutral state" as being something that's not good Epicurean terminology. The references are pretty clear that there are only two feelings, pleasure and pain, and there's no third or neutral condition outside these two. For example:

Quote

1. **Diogenes Laertius X-34** : *"The internal sensations they say are two, pleasure and pain, which occur to every living creature, and the one is akin to nature and the other alien: by means of these two choice and avoidance are determined."*
2. **On Ends Book One, 30** : *"Moreover, seeing that if you deprive a man of his senses there is nothing left to him, it is inevitable that nature herself should be the arbiter of what is in accord with or opposed to nature. Now what facts does she grasp or with what facts is her decision to seek or avoid any particular thing concerned, unless the facts of pleasure and pain?"*
3. **On Ends Book One, 38** : *Therefore Epicurus refused to allow that there is any middle term between pain and pleasure; what was thought by some to be a middle term, the absence of all pain, was not only itself pleasure, but the highest pleasure possible. Surely any one who is conscious of his own condition must needs be either in a state of pleasure or in a state of pain. Epicurus thinks that the highest degree of pleasure is defined by the removal of all pain, so that pleasure may afterwards exhibit diversities and differences but is incapable of increase or extension."*
4. **On Ends Book One, 39** : *For if that were the only pleasure which tickled the senses, as it were, if I may say so, and which overflowed and penetrated them with a certain agreeable feeling, then even a hand could not be content with freedom from pain without some pleasing motion of pleasure. But if the highest pleasure is, as Epicurus asserts, to be free from pain, then, O Chrysippus, the first admission was correctly made to you, that the hand, when it was in that condition, was in want of nothing; but the second admission was not equally correct, that if pleasure were a good it would wish for it. For it would not wish for it for this reason, inasmuch as whatever is free from pain is in pleasure."*

As to "with **highest degree of pleasure** coming from a favorite kinetic pleasure" I think this involves the very good question of switching contexts away from the generalizations, like the highest quantity of pleasure is 100% / 0% pain as in [PD03](#), as well as in these cites (some repetition here) .....

## Quote

1. **On Ends Book One, 38** : *Therefore Epicurus refused to allow that there is any middle term between pain and pleasure; what was thought by some to be a middle term, the absence of all pain, was not only itself pleasure, but the highest pleasure possible. Surely any one who is conscious of his own condition must needs be either in a state of pleasure or in a state of pain. Epicurus thinks that the highest degree of pleasure is defined by the removal of all pain, so that pleasure may afterwards exhibit diversities and differences but is incapable of increase or extension."*
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3. **On Ends Book One, 56** : *By this time so much at least is plain, that the intensest pleasure or the intensest annoyance felt in the mind exerts more influence on the happiness or wretchedness of life than either feeling, when present for an equal space of time in the body. We refuse to believe, however, that when pleasure is removed, grief instantly ensues, excepting when perchance pain has taken the place of the pleasure; but we think on the contrary that we experience joy on the passing away of pains, even though none of that kind of pleasure which stirs the senses has taken their place; and from this it may be understood how great a pleasure it is to be without pain. [57] But as we are elated by the blessings to which we look forward, so we delight in those which we call to memory. Fools however are tormented by the recollection of misfortunes; wise men rejoice in keeping fresh the thankful recollection of their past blessings. Now it is in the power of our wills to bury our adversity in almost unbroken forgetfulness, and to agreeably and sweetly remind ourselves of our prosperity. But when we look with penetration and concentration of thought upon things that are past, then, if those things are bad, grief usually ensues, if good, joy.*

... to switching to the context of whether it is possible to point to particular people at particular times experiencing particular things and say "There, that's an example of what I am talking about!"

I think that's where Patrikos would be correct in pointing to a particular example of a person experiencing some favorite kinetic pleasure without any feeling of mental or bodily pain at the same time. Here we can look back at Torquatus saying repeatedly to Cicero that if you're not experiencing pain then you're experiencing pleasure, and in fact if you represent to me that you are not experiencing any mental or physical pain at all, then what you're telling me is that you're experiencing 100% pleasure, and that's as much pleasure as anyone can experience.

As stated in [PD09](#) pleasures vary in intensity, duration, and parts of the body affected (including the mind) so all experiences of 100% pleasure are not the same for each person, except and only in the respect that if they are 100% for that person then they can't be any better - it's impossible to go past 100%.

I think the main confusion is coming in because people want to compare the experiences of different people when they are "feeling no pain" and they want to say that the particular experiences - though likely involving very different activities - are exactly the same in every respect. As if everyone experiencing 100% pleasure is in some kind of state of euphoria at the right hand of god or something.

It seems to me that that confusion arises from false ideas taught by religion, and that if you start at the beginning of Epicurean philosophy about the nature of the universe, the absence of supernatural gods, the falsity of absolute standards of virtue, and the knowledge that pleasure and pain are feelings given by nature and not concepts or particulars (those are created in our minds) then this problem doesn't trip you up.

When you recognize that the universe is not "designed" and that the atoms and void work together infinite ways over eternal time, and that nature never creates only a single thing of a kind, then you don't even have the expectation that everyone's experiences, pleasurable or painful, are going to be the same.

So Patrikos, who is older like me, due to our age can look upon some experiences as the best we could even hope for, while Rolfe who I understand is much younger, can look aghast at the things that might be 100% pleasing to old guys, and yet there is no philosophical problem. That's why *"he who counsels the young man to live well, but the old man to make a good end, is foolish, not merely because of the desirability of life, but also because it is the same training which teaches to live well and to die well."*

I think it's really good to talk about this because it's a huge stumbling block to people seeing how practical Epicurean philosophy is for everyone. It's particularly a problem for those who want to see Epicurean philosophy grow because our current demographics probably skew toward the nursing home set. 😊 There's no reason at all that that has to be the case, and if

the ancient world had understood Epicurus that way the philosophy would never have been as successful as it was. As Torquatus said we should be ashamed that we did not learn as early as when we were children what Epicurus was teaching. Epicurean philosophy is at least as appropriate for young energetic and active people as it is for those who are slowing down, and it's not telling everyone to slow down. A lot of us need to stop procrastinating on what's really valuable to us in life and speed up!

There's nothing wrong or right intrinsically with wanting "rest," and there's nothing wrong intrinsically with wanting to "seize the day." The choice is a matter of considering your personal circumstances and recognizing that there's no god or ideal form to answer your question, and the best you or anyone can do is as widely and intelligently as possible pursue as much pleasure as you can and avoid as much pain as you can. But we're not just just talking immediate physical stimulation or giggles and jokes, we talking about how we evaluate the fact that we have only a short time to live and how we judge the total results of our actions in all their consequences.

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### **Post by “Rolf” of April 20, 2025 at 4:32 AM**

Well said Cassius!

#### [Quote from Cassius](#)

So Patrikios, who is older like me, due to our age can look upon some experiences as the best we could even hope for, while Rolfe who I understand is much younger, can look aghast at the things that might be 100% pleasing to old guys, and yet there is no philosophical problem.

Exactly! This state of 100% pleasure/0% pain could present itself as a peaceful tranquility, sitting out in nature, but it could just as well occur while dancing to loud music with friends.

I'd also like to reiterate that this state (which I view as more of a hypothetical ideal - correct me if I'm off-base) is NOT a one-and-done state you achieve and then live in perfect harmony for the rest of your days. It's not nirvana. It's simply a description of the greatest pleasure one can experience. Our pleasure and pain levels are constantly fluctuating as we move through life.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of April 20, 2025 at 6:37 AM**

That's the way I see it Rolfe. It is impossible for it to be either "one and done" or "once and ever after in exactly the same condition."

Epicurus could legitimately view the last day of his life as happy or even one of his happiest, given his appreciation for what he had accomplished throughout his life and his present overall circumstances in total. But that appreciation didn't eliminate the presence of his extreme physical pain of his advanced disease that was also present.

It would make no sense for him to have said that he would not have preferred to have the same pleasures but without the accompanying pain. There was no cosmic necessity that he die of kidney disease rather than of old age in his sleep unexpectedly without that pain. The latter would have been preferable.

And he didn't say "Ever since I was 50 and reached a complete understanding of my philosophy I have never felt any pain" or anything like that. He acknowledged his pain but held that his pleasures far outweighed them and that he was happy to be alive to experience that day.

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### **Post by “Don” of April 20, 2025 at 9:22 AM**

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

[Don](#) any thoughts on this? Maybe you have something to add about the use of negation in ancient Greek language, and the pattern of words that often occurs?

I'm sorry, [Kalosyni](#). This flew under my radar. I don't have any thoughts off the top of my head, but I'm intrigued. I'll share any I might discover. Maybe [Bryan](#) or [Eikadistes](#) would have thoughts?

That said, great posts here on this thread. Y'all are providing some solid summaries of the "absence of pain" idea.

[Rolf](#) For recently joining our little online Garden, your contributions are insightful and greatly appreciated. Glad to have you aboard.

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### **Post by “Bryan” of April 20, 2025 at 10:21 AM**

Definitions set boundaries around particular characteristics.

From a certain angle, definitions (or "limits,") *can only* say what something is not -- and it is "examples" that say what something is.

Consider an ancient scholiast on Dionysius Thrax's Τέχνη Γραμματική (The Art of Grammar):

"And Epíkouros - although he used **examples (αἱ ὑπογραφαί)** all the time - he shows that **limits (οἱ ὅροι)** are more valuable, [because he used] limits instead of examples in his work of his natural philosophy lecture: while dividing everything into atom and void by using limits - and while saying that an atom is a solid body having no share of interposition with the void. Void is an intangible nature, that is, untouchable."

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### Post by "Godfrey" of April 20, 2025 at 12:07 PM

#### [Quote from Cassius](#)

And he didn't say "Ever since I was 50 and reached a complete understanding of my philosophy I have never felt any pain" or anything like that. He acknowledged his pain but held that his pleasures far outweighed them and that he was happy to be alive to experience that day.

It's been some time since I read Gosling and Taylor, but if I recall correctly, they consider the understanding of philosophy to be something of a one-and-done pleasure and they call it katastematic. But as you say, that by no means implies an end of pain. Pains and pleasures still come and go (for some reason an image of swirling around comes to mind) but the stable pleasure of correct philosophy can outweigh most, if not all, of the pains.

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### Post by "Cassius" of April 20, 2025 at 2:44 PM

#### [Quote from Godfrey](#)

It's been some time since I read Gosling and Taylor, but if I recall correctly, they consider the understanding of philosophy to be something of a one-and-done pleasure and they call it katastematic.

Unfortunately I cannot outright confirm or deny that statement with a particular cite. Since Rolf is new and is actively engaged in this thread, rather than pass over it let me just say I consider that Gosling and Taylor's "The Greeks on Pleasure" to be one of the most exhaustive and best resources these issues involving pleasure.

However it is also very long and detailed and not a quick read. Especially in the katastematic pleasure chapter (which is the inspiration for the Boris [Nikolsky](#) article here in the files section of the forum which I highly recommend that Rolfe read first) Gosling and Taylor tend to be so cautious in their wording that it is sometimes hard (at least for me) to be sure what their conclusion really is.

It seems to me that they were especially cautious in their wording of the katatestematic discussion, likely because they were aware that they were disagreeing with the powers-that-be in the academic world who take the majority view that Epicurus identified the true goal as ataraxia and ataraxia to be a katastematic pleasure. It is clear that G&T's chapter disagrees with that viewpoint, and Emily Austin states in a footnote in her book that she agrees with G&T's position. G&T also inspired [Nikolsky](#) to write his article "Epicurus On Pleasure," but not because G&T stated their conclusion in revolutionary flag-waving terms.

Even though it's immediately apparent that "katetestematic pleasure" has all sorts of issues even describing, the issues can also be subtle, and it takes considerable time to understand why the issue is important. But it is very important because getting caught up in amorphous and exotic thoughts that can seem to be implied by the term "katastematic pleasure" is (in my view) the best way to turn any normal person into a useless ivory-tower jellyfish and make them run from Epicurus as fast as they can. And that's the reason why I think that viewpoint is so favored by many, especially by those who can otherwise hardly find it in themselves to utter the word "pleasure."

I would highly recommend to Rolfe or anyone else who has the time (but not early in their reading!!) that they should eventually read the G&T book. If someone is new and simply has to get to the bottom of that issue, read the [Nikolsky](#) article as it is much shorter and more clear in its conclusions.

The main danger is to energetic people (either younger like Rolfe or motivated at any age) who pick up from conventional articles praising katastematic pleasure and think it is the true goal of Epicurus. Most of them will sense immediately that there are all sorts of issues and contradictions in it, and they will think that if Epicurus thought that then he is worthless to them, just as they should reject all forms of otherworldly Buddhism / Stoicism / nothingness / ivory tower detachment.

There are very legitimate ways of making sense of what Diogenes Laertius has to say about katastematic pleasure, and Boris [Nikolsky](#) offers explanations as do Don and others here. I think Emily Austin made a very good decision to confine it to a footnote in her book and not get

distracted by it. There's a time and place for fighting it out on this issue, and we do that here in the forum if you dig into prior discussions, but representing katastematic pleasure to new people as the real goal of Epicurus is the best way to send normal healthy people running away from Epicurean philosophy.

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### Post by “Don” of April 20, 2025 at 4:08 PM

#### [Quote from Cassius](#)

and ataraxia to be a katastematic pleasure

For the record, ataraxia IS one of Epicurus' examples of a katastematic pleasures.

"ἡ μὲν γὰρ **ἀταραξία** καὶ ἀπονία **καταστηματικαὶ εἰσὶν ἡδοναί:** ἡ δὲ χαρὰ καὶ ἡ εὐφροσύνη κατὰ κίνησιν ἐνεργεῖα βλέπονται."

Epicurus says in his work *On Choice* are : "Peace of mind (ataraxia) and freedom from pain (aponia) are pleasures pertaining to a state or condition (katastēmarikai eisin hēdonai); joy and delight are seen to consist in motion and activity." (my translation)

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### Post by “Cassius” of April 20, 2025 at 4:19 PM

Yes, Don thanks, that is a comment by Diogenes Laertius, who is consistent with Cicero and Athenaeus (if [Nikolsky](#)'s comments below are correct). To make it easier on those who have not read [Nikolsky](#)'s full article, here is his abstract explaining how he takes the clues set out by Gosling & Taylor and then explains how these three men may have come to make their commentary. For those who can go down the rabbit hole without being distracted and turned off, it's a fascinating subject.

G&T really do a great job of tracking down all aspects of "The Greeks on Pleasure" from the earliest days, through Epicurus, and through the original and later uses of these terms. I've read it all through once, but can't say I have a command of it at all. It's a bear to try to dive in and then come up for air.

Quote

## ABSTRACT

The paper deals with the question of the attribution to Epicurus of the classification of pleasures into 'kinetic' and 'static'. This classification, usually regarded as authentic, confronts us with a number of problems and contradictions. Besides, it is only mentioned in a few sources that are not the most reliable. Following Gosling and Taylor, I believe that the authenticity of the classification may be called in question.

The analysis of the ancient evidence concerning Epicurus' concept of pleasure is made according to the following principle: first, I consider the sources that do not mention the distinction between 'kinetic' and 'static' pleasures, and only then do I compare them with the other group of texts which comprises reports by Cicero, Diogenes Laertius and Athenaeus. From the former group of texts there emerges a concept of pleasure as a single and not twofold notion, while such terms as 'motion' and 'state' describe not two different phenomena but only two characteristics of the same phenomenon. On the other hand, the reports comprising the latter group appear to derive from one and the same doxographical tradition, and to be connected with the classification of ethical doctrines put forward by the Middle Academy and known as the *divisio Carneadea*. In conclusion, I argue that the idea of Epicurus' classification of pleasures is based on a misinterpretation of Epicurus' concept in Academic doxography, which tended to contrapose it to doctrines of other schools, above all to the Cyrenaics' views.

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### Post by “Godfrey” of April 20, 2025 at 7:58 PM

For me, a way that is much more useful than kinetic-katastematic in thinking about various pleasures is in terms of intensity, duration and location. This can be found in the PDs, although not without some effort. Another practical way to examine particular pleasures and pains is to look at whether you can expect them to result in net pleasure or net pain, and act accordingly.

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### Post by “Don” of April 20, 2025 at 8:08 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Yes, Don thanks, that is a comment by Diogenes Laertius, who is consistent with Cicero and Athenaeus (if [Nikolsky](#)'s comments below are correct).

It's not a comment by Diogenes; it's a quote from Epicurus' own work.

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### **Post by “Don” of April 21, 2025 at 7:05 AM**

For the record, I don't think the kinetic/katastematic distinction is the most paramount issue to be resolved in Epicurean philosophy. I do, however, believe it needs to be addressed. As with all things Epicurus, the loss of ancient texts from actual Epicureans is problematic. We have that whole "through a glass darkly" issue in trying to get at what the school itself thought.

On rereading (okay, skimming through) [Nikolsky](#), I find that argument less and less compelling. That paper, to my reading, seems to be implying Epicurus didn't use the distinction between kinetic/katastematic. This simply seems to blatantly contradict the quotation from Epicurus himself in *Choices and Avoidances* cited in DL X.136.

I remain intrigued by Gosling and Taylor.

We've had some knock-down-drag-out threads on this. I was reading a good long one from 2023! There is no one consensus among long time forum members that I can see. That doesn't make us rivals! Just means this is a thorny issue with multiple possible perspectives. This seems a good a place as any to rejoin that discussion, because [Kalosyni](#) 's question about negation follows right on from Epicurus' use of a-taraxia and a-ponia.

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### **Post by “Rolf” of April 21, 2025 at 8:02 AM**

Really interesting discussion, thanks everyone. I'll be sure to check out [Nikolsky](#) and later G&T, though I feel I should first get a broad understanding of the philosophy via Austin and DeWitt.

That said, I'm not sure I quite see the point at issue here. Pleasures vary in duration, intensity, and location. Of course I would prefer a katastematic pleasure. More sustainable, longer lasting pleasure. It's like asking someone if they want \$1000 now or \$100 per month for 2 years. It's a matter of prudence.

At the same time, I don't think that turns such pleasures into a specific goal. The goal is still just pleasure generally. I forget who said this, perhaps it was an older forum post, but getting wrapped up trying to define pleasure and pain sort of takes away from the whole "pleasure and pain are our inherent, instinctively knowable guides" thing. I do understand that it's important to discuss this stuff though - I find myself especially interested in hearing criticisms and flawed takes on Epicureanism. It helps me to understand what is \*not\* Epicureanism. I suppose you could say I'm not just looking for an understanding of epicurean philosophy, but an absence of misunderstanding. 😊

[Cassius](#) Would you be able to sum up this flawed view of katastematic pleasure that mainstream academia purports?

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### **Post by "Don" of April 21, 2025 at 8:24 AM**

#### [Quote from Rolf](#)

Would you be able to sum up this flawed view of katastematic pleasure that mainstream academia purports?

For me, the mainstream academic and frankly broad public general position seems to boil down to:

- Epicurus goal was ataraxia, ie serenity.
- That's similar to Buddhism, Stoicism, et al.
- We'll dismiss Epicurus since "he's basically saying the same thing as these other philosophies."

Now, there are some great academics and lay proponents of Epicurus out there (Looking at you, Austin and Sedley!), but that's my take above on the general vibe of the hoi polloi.

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### **Post by "Cassius" of April 21, 2025 at 9:28 AM**

Don's summary of the issue is excellent. I would only add that in addition to the conclusion that there's no reason to read Epicurus because he's the same as Buddhism and Stoicism, you of

course add on the huge baggage of *why* one should not choose to pursue Buddhism or Stoicism.

#### [Quote from Rolf](#)

That said, I'm not sure I quite see the point at issue here. Pleasures vary in duration, intensity, and location. Of course I would prefer a katastematic pleasure. More sustainable, longer lasting pleasure. It's like asking someone if they want \$1000 now or \$100 per month for 2 years. It's a matter of prudence.

Yes, that statement illustrates how confusing this question can be. The issue is that when most people (excluding those who see it like Don does) talk about katastematic pleasure, they are not simply referring to "any pleasure that is sustainable and longer lasting." And they are not talking about katastematic pleasure as "one of many kinds of pleasure." The point I am arguing against is that many people explicitly or implicitly state that katastematic pleasure, which they equate with "ataraxia" or "freedom from pain" is the ultimate goal of Epicurean pleasure, rather than the much wider term "pleasure," which includes katastematic pleasure, but also includes kinetic pleasure.

Of course at this point we're already down the road of glazing over peoples' eyes because they understandably aren't sure what "katastematic" and "kinetic" means, so they default to thinking that it means "ataraxia" which is also highly ambiguous or just "absence of pain" which means nothing standing alone any more than it would be to say "absence of elephants." "Absence of....." doesn't tell you anything unless you have a conceptual framework that there are only two possibilities, and that the only other possibility is pleasure. But the people I am arguing against rarely explain that, because their whole issue is that they don't want to accept the common understanding of "pleasure" in the first place, because that would draw a bright red line between Epicurus and Buddhism and Stoicism.

So many commentators package this question into the view that katastematic pleasure is the only really desirable pleasure, and that the only reason we care about kinetic pleasures is so that we can obtain katastematic pleasure. They argue that once we have katasatematic pleasure we no longer have need of kinetic pleasure, and they'll cite this part of the letter to Menoeceus: *"For the end of all our actions is to be free from pain and fear, and, when once we have attained all this, the tempest of the soul is laid; seeing that the living creature has no need to go in search of something that is lacking, nor to look for anything else by which the good of the soul and of the body will be fulfilled. When we are pained because of the absence of pleasure, then, and then only, do we feel the need of pleasure."*

And indeed if you are the normal man on the street today and take that statement at face value, it DOES sound Buddhist or Stoic or worse. The problem only gets resolved when you take into account Epicurus's many statements about pleasure in the rest of the philosophy, including the fact that (as with gods) Epicurus is giving a very unusual meaning to a term that everyone

else uses differently. But no man-on-the-street has the experience to be able to do that, so they run in the opposite direction. Which in my view is exactly the goal of the perps I am referring to, because their goal is to remain smugly happy in their eclectic blends of Buddhism and Stoicism without worry that anyone will ever see that Epicurus was arguing *against* their position, not *in favor of it*.

Gosling and Taylor exhaustively go through many examples of the contradictions that the standard view of katastematic pleasure causes, G&T conclude that these contradictions do not mean that katastematic pleasure is somehow the ultimate goal of Epicurean philosophy: they conclude that Epicurus saw pleasure as a unified thing, and that katastematic pleasure is only one sort of pleasure. And that's where [Nikolsky](#) picks up and points out that in the centuries between Epicurus and Cicero (and additional time after that to Diogenes Laertius) people like Carneades - in their fetish to categorize things - placed an emphasis on this division that is not mentioned by the true believers like Lucretius and Diogenes of Oinoanda or to my recollection Philodemus either, and thus was not of major significance to Epicurus himself.

But it's become the hallmark of discussion of Epicurus in the modern world because when accepted in the way it is often discussed, it turns much of the philosophy upside down and makes much of the rest of it self-contradictory.

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### Post by “Rolf” of April 21, 2025 at 9:37 AM

#### [Quote from Cassius](#)

"For the end of all our actions is to be free from pain and fear, and, when once we have attained all this, the tempest of the soul is laid; seeing that the living creature has no need to go in search of something that is lacking, nor to look for anything else by which the good of the soul and of the body will be fulfilled. When we are pained because of the absence of pleasure, then, and then only, do we feel the need of pleasure."

Hmm, I do find myself struggling to reconcile this one. Could you help me break it down?

Does my understanding of the value/importance of katastematic pleasure sound correct to you?

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### Post by “Cassius” of April 21, 2025 at 10:00 AM

I started on that in the the prior post but deleted it because i was getting too long.

In summary, my view of that is that Epicurus is speaking conceptually as to the nature of the goal.

The essential premise that is unstated here but which is present in [PD03](#) and recorded at length by Cicero in Torquatus' explanation of Epicurean ethics, there are only two feelings, pleasure and pain, and when you don't have pain you have pleasure. All this is reinforced immediately in the letter by the following:

#### Quote

*129] And for this cause we call pleasure the beginning and end of the blessed life. For we recognize pleasure as the first good innate in us, and from pleasure we begin every act of choice and avoidance, and to pleasure we return again, using the feeling as the standard by which we judge every good. And since pleasure is the first good and natural to us, for this very reason we do not choose every pleasure, but sometimes we pass over many pleasures, when greater discomfort accrues to us as the result of them: and similarly we think many pains better than pleasures, since a greater pleasure comes to us when we have endured pains for a long time. Every pleasure then because of its natural kinship to us is good, yet not every pleasure is to be chosen: even as every pain also is an evil, yet not all are always of a nature to be avoided.*

It's my view that Epicurus expected Menoeceus or any other student of his reading the letter to understand the wider context of there being only two feelings. Unfortunately, people today don't know the context, so they don't understand how saying "absence of pain" is the equivalent of saying "pleasure."

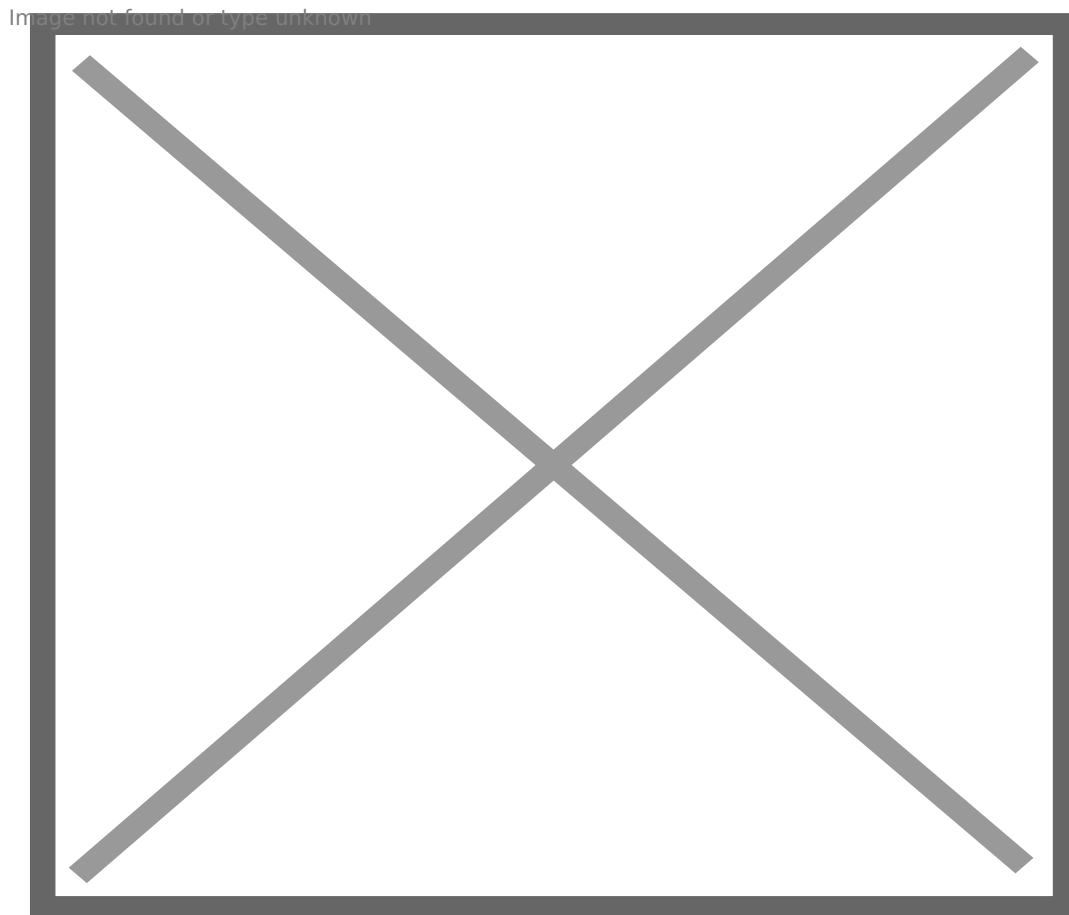
To me that context resolves the part of the passage that is arguably the worst if not understood. "*When we are pained because of the absence of pleasure, then, and then only, do we feel the need of pleasure.*"

When you know that "absence of pleasure" means "pain" just like "absence of pain" means pleasure, you realize that he's just stating the obvious. *When you have pain*, that means there's a gap in your goal of life that needs to be filled with pleasure. *When you have no pain*, that means there is no gap in your goal of life, because your life is already filled with pleasure. At that point, you have no further need for more pleasure, because your life is already filled with pleasure. This does not deprecate pleasure but emphasizes that pleasure is the only thing that really counts.

You'll also see here on the forum lots of discussion of "the limit of pleasure" as referenced in [PD03](#) and in reference to an argument by Plato, who alleged that because pleasure has no limit then it cannot be the ultimate good.

By showing that pleasure does have a limit, and thus there is a state which can be described as "the best," Epicurus refutes Plato's argument. When you think about it, it's obvious that the best state of pleasure is 100% pleasure. At that point, you have no need, or ability to experience, anything more.

I have several collections of quotes on this as I'm constantly working on a better presentation of them. Here are three:



[On Epicurean Views Of Pleasure - Epicureanfriends.com](#)

[www.epicureanfriends.com](http://www.epicureanfriends.com)

A second is here: [https://wiki.epicureanfriends.com/doku.php/the\\_norm\\_is\\_pleasure\\_too](https://wiki.epicureanfriends.com/doku.php/the_norm_is_pleasure_too)

And a third:



Article

## [A Gate To Be Burst: "Absence of Pain"](#)

It is interesting to think about what Lucretius had in mind in Book One of *"On The Nature of Things"* when he spoke about Epicurus *"yearning to be the first to burst through the close-set bolts upon the gates of nature."* What kind of gates was he talking about? Who bolted them? How do those gates keep us from Nature?

I can't be sure which gates Lucretius had in mind, but I can suggest one "gate" that is particularly in need of bursting, as it stands directly in the way of a better understanding...



Cassius

February 12, 2024 at 1:26 PM

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### **Post by "Godfrey" of April 21, 2025 at 10:30 AM**

Might Elayne's article from several years ago be pertinent? She used the term "fancy pleasure" to elucidate the trouble with the common take on katastematic pleasure as I recall.

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### **Post by "Cassius" of April 21, 2025 at 10:36 AM**

Yes definitely Godfrey:



Article

## [On Pain, Pleasure, And Happiness](#)

Brief: The feelings are only two, pleasure and pain—there is no third state such as neutral, and there are no “fancy pleasures” which are different from regular pleasures. Because there is no neutral, reducing pain in life is only possible if there is a corresponding increase in pleasure. The extent of pleasure can be maximized by making sure to attend to all parts of one’s body, including the brain. Happiness is comprised of a pleasurable life. The capacity for pain is a valuable warning system and should not be disabled except in unusual conditions. The experience of pain is to be avoided except when it is chosen for the sake of greater pleasure/ lesser pain over the lifespan. Humans have many shared responses of pain or pleasure to specific experiences, and they also have individual variations. The standard of pleasure in one’s life must be one’s own subjective feelings, not a generic advice. There are many pitfalls to avoid if one desires a happy, pleasure-filled life, such as a false belief in a neutral state, practices which attempt to disable the normal capacity to feel pleasure and pain, and failure to consider the long-term pains and pleasures resulting from actions. In discussing pain and pleasure, Epicureans stick to real life situations, not hypothetical philosophical puzzles.

Elayne

July 15, 2019 at 2:18 PM

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### **Post by “Cassius” of April 21, 2025 at 11:06 AM**

To illustrate how this plays out, the quote below is the way the Epicureanism Wikipedia page as of today starts off.

Quote

**Epicureanism** is a system of [philosophy](#) founded 307 [BCE](#) based upon the teachings of [Epicurus](#), an [ancient Greek philosopher](#). Epicurus was an [atomist](#) and [materialist](#), following in the steps of [Democritus](#). His materialism led him to [religious skepticism](#) and a general attack on superstition and divine intervention. Epicureanism was originally a challenge to [Platonism](#), and its main opponent later became [Stoicism](#). It is a form of [hedonism](#) insofar as it declares pleasure to be its sole intrinsic goal. However, the concept that the absence of pain and fear constitutes the greatest pleasure, and its advocacy of a simple life, make it very different from hedonism as [colloquially](#) understood.

Following the [Cyrenaic](#) philosopher [Aristippus](#), Epicurus believed that the greatest good was to seek modest, sustainable pleasure in the form of a state of [ataraxia](#) (tranquility and freedom from fear) and [aponia](#) (the absence of bodily pain) through knowledge of the workings of the world and limiting desires. Correspondingly, Epicurus and his followers generally withdrew from politics because it could lead to frustrations and ambitions that would conflict with their pursuit of virtue and peace of mind.<sup>[1]</sup>

I would argue that the first paragraph sets the incorrect tone (absence of pain, without more explanation, is the greatest pleasure) that leads to the false conclusions in the second paragraph (that Epicurus advocated withdrawal from engagement with the world in favor of mental contemplation).

The first paragraph fails to explain that there are only two feelings, and that if you are not feeling pain then you are feeling pleasure, and vice versa.

Omission of this premise plants the implication that "absence of pain" does not include the type of ordinary pleasures that normal people consider the term to include, and that this transcendent condition is separate from and takes the place of pleasures as ordinarily understood.

In contrast to Epicurus, who is *widening* the definition of pleasure to include not only the standard active pleasures, but also all experiences whether active or stable that are not painful, the Wikipedia approach *narrows* the definition of pleasure.

The Wikipedia viewpoint deprecates joy and delight and standard active pleasures, and leaves behind only the implication that Epicurus was advocating the type of mental detachment that is characteristic of Stoicism, Buddhism, and otherworldly philosophies and religions.

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**Post by “Rolf” of April 21, 2025 at 4:47 PM**

## [Quote from Cassius](#)

Yes definitely Godfrey:



Article

## [On Pain, Pleasure, And Happiness](#)

Brief: The feelings are only two, pleasure and pain—there is no third state such as neutral, and there are no “fancy pleasures” which are different from regular pleasures. Because there is no neutral, reducing pain in life is only possible if there is a corresponding increase in pleasure. The extent of pleasure can be maximized by making sure to attend to all parts of one’s body, including the brain. Happiness is comprised of a pleasurable life. The capacity for pain is a valuable warning system and should not be disabled except in unusual conditions. The experience of pain is to be avoided except when it is chosen for the sake of greater pleasure/ lesser pain over the lifespan. Humans have many shared responses of pain or pleasure to specific experiences, and they also have individual variations. The standard of pleasure in one’s life must be one’s own subjective feelings, not a generic advice. There are many pitfalls to avoid if one desires a happy, pleasure-filled life, such as a false belief in a neutral state, practices which attempt to disable the normal capacity to feel pleasure and pain, and failure to consider the long-term pains and pleasures resulting from actions. In discussing pain and pleasure, Epicureans stick to real life situations, not hypothetical philosophical puzzles.

Elayne

July 15, 2019 at 2:18 PM

Reading this now - immensely helpful. Perhaps it would be good to consolidate these particularly useful posts/articles somewhere on the site? There's so much good stuff on here but it feels a bit scattered.

## Post by “Cassius” of April 21, 2025 at 5:24 PM

### [Quote from Rolf](#)

There's so much good stuff on here but it feels a bit scattered.

Yes that's definitely a problem. Right now there are buttons and links to places where certain things are featured, but it's a bear trying to make decisions on how to prioritize.

In most sections of site, such as the "Articles," there is a "Featured" aspect where we try to highlight the most important entries in that section.

It's an ongoing battle to try to improve this. This is why, at present, the "front page" of the site contains a lot of text, rather than being more airy and white-space-filled like some designs. I'm trying to make that front page the place that you can't really get past without being exposed to the core ideas.

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## Post by “Kalosyni” of April 21, 2025 at 5:29 PM

On some level I am still having a hard time being able to integrate the idea of only two feelings: pleasure and pain.

The usual cognition of the word "pleasure" and which has been with me most of my life until encountering Epicurean philosophy, seems like it has almost an eternal "prolepsis" of being bodily sensation and a kind of movement/active state, (and pain being a sensation that is more than just a mild discomfort). In my mind this leaves out the state of "feeling satisfied" (and therefore not needing anything to be different than it is).

Feeling satisfied is pleasurable, but not in the same sense as eating chocolate or having an orgasm.

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## Post by “Godfrey” of April 21, 2025 at 5:32 PM

Intensity, location, duration 😊

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## Post by “Rolf” of April 21, 2025 at 5:38 PM

### [Quote from Kalosyni](#)

The usual cognition of the word "pleasure" and which has been with me most of my life until encountering Epicurean philosophy, seems like it has almost an eternal "prolepsis" of being bodily sensation and a kind of movement/active state, (and pain being a sensation that is more than just a mild discomfort). In my mind this leaves out the state of "feeling satisfied" (and therefore not needing anything to be different than it is).

I think part of it is learning to become more aware of one's feelings, along with gratitude and appreciation. While in the past, before encountering Epicurean philosophy, I might have dismissed a state of "mere" satiety as a bland neutral state, I can now see that this is a pleasure in itself. This in particular has been a great boon to me, as it's helped me to gain a far more positive perspective on both my own life and life in general, by realising how much pleasure there really is.

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## Post by “Cassius” of April 21, 2025 at 5:47 PM

### [Quote from Kalosyni](#)

On some level I am still having a hard time being able to integrate the idea of only two feelings: pleasure and pain.

And this is why Cicero is so vocal in complaining about Epicurus' references to pleasure. Cicero is capitalizing on the fact that Epicurus is clearly using non-standard terminology, but Cicero isn't explaining that and only allows Torquatus to explain it briefly.

But understanding that this is a conceptual division that makes sense, even though it is non-standard, is the only way to make sense of the passages we find difficult, like the passage from Menoecus we're discussing. This is why we've cited DeWitt's summary of this issue so often. Cicero is right that Epicurus is speaking about pleasure in a manner many people find confusing. But just as with 'gods,' there's a better way to look at both gods and pleasure. The name "god" can be used to describe something(s) that really do exist, but not supernaturally. The name "Pleasure" can also be used to describe something extremely important to human life, but the word as most people use it is being used too narrowly:

Quote from "Epicurus And His Philosophy" page 240 - Norman DeWitt (emphasis added)

#### Quote

"The extension of the name of pleasure to this normal state of being was the major innovation of the new hedonism. It was in the negative form, freedom from pain of body and distress of mind, that it drew the most persistent and vigorous condemnation from adversaries. The contention was that the application of the name of pleasure to this state was unjustified on the ground that two different things were thereby being denominated by one name. Cicero made a great to-do over this argument, but it is really superficial and captious. The fact that the name of pleasure was not customarily applied to the normal or static state did not alter the fact that the name ought to be applied to it; nor that reason justified the application; nor that human beings would be the happier for so reasoning and believing.

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#### Post by "Cassius" of April 21, 2025 at 5:53 PM

##### [Quote from Rolf](#)

I think part of it is learning to become more aware of one's feelings, along with gratitude and appreciation. While in the past, before encountering Epicurean philosophy, I might have dismissed a state of "mere" satiety as a bland neutral state, I can now see that this is a pleasure in itself. This in particular has been a great boon to me, as it's helped me to gain a far more positive perspective on both my own life and life in general, by realising how much pleasure there really is.

I think you're going in the right direction, but in addition to this you'll want to consider closely what DeWitt has to say about terminology around page 240 of his book. You'll also see the issues illustrated most clearly when you look closely at Torquatus' argument with Cicero in books one and especially two of "On Ends."

It's going to take time to go through all the texts and evidence. There's no shortcut, and this is why there's such a problem in talking about Epicurus to people who aren't really interested in the details but only want to "have a good time." Those people hear "pleasure" and like Pavlov's dog they are programmed to hear nothing except "sex, drugs, and rock'n'roll." Yes, those are included, but they are not the full picture.

But in the end I think you'll see that Gosling and Taylor were right in striking back against the orthodoxy, and why DeWitt's quote on page 240 is also correct.

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## Post by “vlasalv” of April 22, 2025 at 3:44 AM

I suppose, at least in my early understanding, that Epicurus indeed used the words 'pleasure' and 'pain' as conceptual markers rather than literal interpretations. His 'pleasure' seems to point more toward an inner tranquility - a state of peace rather than momentary delight. In that light, certain pains might be endured for the sake of greater inner peace, if they lead to that deep serenity. I wonder if Mildred Lisette Norman, the Peace Pilgrim, reached that state. Could she be seen as a modern figure who attained the god-like state that Epicurus spoke of?

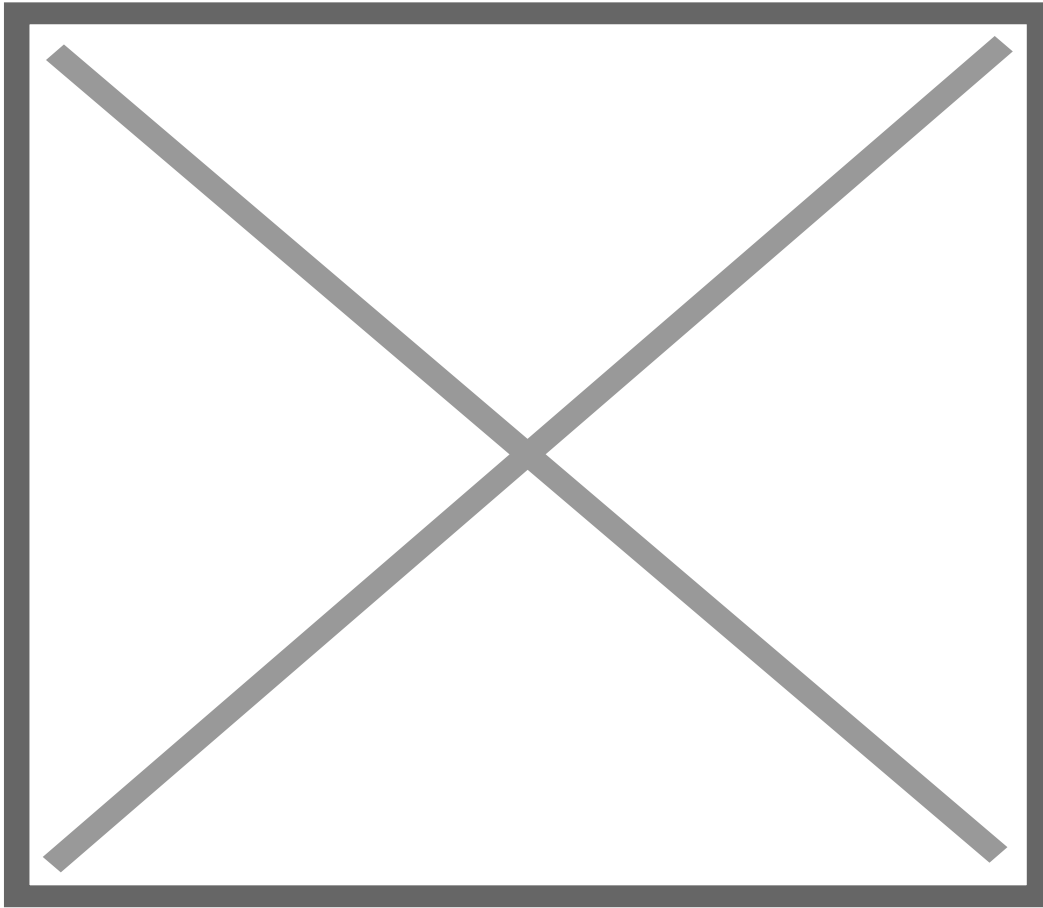
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## Post by “Rolf” of April 22, 2025 at 5:52 AM

### [Quote from vlasalv](#)

I suppose, at least in my early understanding, that Epicurus indeed used the words 'pleasure' and 'pain' as conceptual markers rather than literal interpretations. His 'pleasure' seems to point more toward an inner tranquility - a state of peace rather than momentary delight. In that light, certain pains might be endured for the sake of greater inner peace, if they lead to that deep serenity. I wonder if Mildred Lisette Norman, the Peace Pilgrim, reached that state. Could she be seen as a modern figure who attained the god-like state that Epicurus spoke of?

Hey Vlas, welcome to the forum! I'm sure others will be able to explain this better, but the equating of "pleasure" with "a tranquil state" is a common pitfall in the understanding of Epicurean philosophy. When Epicurus says pleasure, he *means* pleasure. This includes pleasure of all kinds: The "state of peace" *and* the "momentary delight". The goal of Epicureanism is very much pleasure, complete pleasure, and not some kind of detached nirvana-esque state of serenity - no "god-like state", at least not in any typical understanding of the term.



[Which Is It? Is "Ataraxia" Or "Pleasure" The Ultimate Epicurean Goal? - Epicureanfriends.com](http://www.epicureanfriends.com)  
www.epicureanfriends.com

This might be a good place to start!

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**Post by “Cassius” of April 22, 2025 at 7:08 AM**

[Quote from vlasalv](#)

In that light, certain pains might be endured for the sake of greater inner peace, if they lead to that deep serenity.

There's definitely a lot to think about in coming to terms with what Epicurus means by the word pleasure, but just as with "gods," Epicurus did not change the word, just made its use more precise.

The danger in giving up the word "pleasure" and substituting "peace" or anything else in its place is that the result is to narrow the definition and to imply that what people ordinarily think of as pleasure is not part of the goal, and that danger is present whether the word one chooses is "peace" or "tranquility" or "absence of pain" or anything else. The ancient writers were very clear in stating that Epicurus was held to be an advocate of "pleasure," and that words like tranquility or peace fall within pleasure, not the other way around. As Epicurus is reported to have said, he would not know what the good is were it not for pleasures that we all understand to be pleasures. For example:

Quote

**Athenaeus, Deipnosophists, XII p. 546E:** "Not only Aristippus and his followers, but also Epicurus and his welcomed kinetic pleasure; I will mention what follows, to avoid speaking of the "storms" {of passion} and the "delicacies" which Epicurus often cites, and the "stimuli" which he mentions in his On the End-Goal. For he says "For I at least do not even know what I should conceive the good to be, if I eliminate the pleasures of taste, and eliminate the pleasures of sex, and eliminate the pleasures of listening, and eliminate the pleasant motions caused in our vision by a visible form."

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## Post by "vlasalv" of April 22, 2025 at 7:41 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

The danger in giving up the word "pleasure" and substituting "peace" or anything else in its place is that the result is to narrow the definition and to imply that what people ordinarily think of as pleasure is not part of the goal, and that danger is present whether the word one chooses is "peace" or "tranquility" or "absence of pain" or anything else. The ancient writers were very clear in stating that Epicurus was held to be an advocate of "pleasure," and that words like tranquility or peace fall within pleasure, not the other way around.

Then one might say: 'When my glass is unwaveringly full, I dwell in peaceful pleasure.' Understanding 'glass' as the body/mind in the most purely materialistic way?

That could be called bliss!

## Post by “Kalosyni” of April 22, 2025 at 8:08 AM

I think it is important to see that in studying Epicurean philosophy there are three things going on:

- 1) Knowing what exactly Epicurus said according to the extant texts
- 2) Understanding what he said and either agreeing, or coming up with a personalized understanding (which may end up slightly deviating from what Epicurus said)
- 3) Putting into practice what Epicurus said, or putting into practice one's own individualized interpretation

But it is important to be clear about not mixing up points (1) and (2) -- primarily for the purposed of this forum which is a place to learn what Epicurus said. 😊

We are all free to decide if we personally agree or not, or if we want to be "eclectic" - and I've found a good place to explore that in my own private personal journal - as I sometimes experimentally flesh out my individualized ideas (and this is a suggestion for others if they need it).

This takes off the pressure to try to make Epicurus into something he is not. And helps the forum stay focused on exactly what Epicurus said in his [Principal Doctrines](#) and Letters. I always go back to the [Principal Doctrines](#) when my understanding feels unclear (or any confusion due to opposing or incorrect views).

You can find the [Principal Doctrines here](#) 😊

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## Post by “Cassius” of April 22, 2025 at 8:11 AM

Or as Cicero wrote:

**Cicero, *In defense of Publius Sestius*, 10.23:** “He {Publius Clodius} praised those most who are said to be above all others the teachers and eulogists of pleasure {the Epicureans}. ... He added that these same men were quite right in saying that the wise do everything for their own interests; that no sane man should engage in public affairs; that *nothing was preferable to a life of tranquility crammed full of pleasures*.

[Here is a link to Perseus where the Latin and translation of this can be compared](#). The Latin is: “nihil esse praestabilius otiosa vita, plena et conferta voluptatibus.” See also here for [word](#)

[translations.](#)

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## Post by “Eikadistes” of April 22, 2025 at 9:17 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

[Don](#) any thoughts on this? Maybe you have something to add about the use of negation in ancient Greek language, and the pattern of words that often occurs?

I'm sorry, [Kalosyni](#). This flew under my radar. I don't have any thoughts off the top of my head, but I'm intrigued. I'll share any I might discover. Maybe [Bryan](#) or [Eikadistes](#) would have thoughts?

That said, great posts here on this thread. Y'all are providing some solid summaries of the "absence of pain" idea.

[Rolf](#) For recently joining our little online Garden, your contributions are insightful and greatly appreciated. Glad to have you aboard.

As I've observed with other philosophers, Epíkouros is no stranger to capitalizing on Hellenic word formation by coining his own phrases with affixes , so he does occasionally throw the prefix **ἀ-** to render "**not [this]**" when re-naming a positive idea and re-framing it as a negation. I don't necessarily think that is a defining quality of his literary voice, but it may reflect his philosophical approach.

The one thing I definitely see in terms of negation is his reasoning:

- I. "**A is the case.**"
- II. "**If B were the case, we would observe Y.**"
- III. "**In fact, we observe X, not Y.**"
- IV. "**Therefore A is the case.**"

For example:

- I. "**Particles have a maximum, tiny size.**"
- II. "**If they didn't, we would see particles with the naked eye.**"
- III. "**We cannot see particles.**"

#### IV. "Therefore, particles have a maximum, tiny size."

Now, all that said, who you **really** want for this discussion is Nietzsche. **100%**. Epicurean theory of language is about frankness. All words are indicative, and each word reflects exactly one object or idea with a 1:1 evaluation. Preconceptions reinforce this, that there are universal notions that all humans shared based on similar experience, and those notions are positive indications of *what is*. Nietzsche, on the other hand **thrived** with linguistic negation. He has an extensive discussion of language and the development of speech wherein he proposes (this is key) that "*truth is a mobile army of metaphors*", meaning that every word is figurative, and can only be defined in relation to *what is* **not**. He might suggest that "*blue*" is less usefully defined as "*the dark, cold color*" or "*cloudless sky*", and is more usefully defined as "*not red-orange-yellow-green-violet*": (EDIT: Or, a better example, he explains that you cannot define a word without using other words that don't mean what that word means.)

Come to think of it, Joseph Campbell, the mythologist, has a great discussion about this idea. I forget where (I want to say a TV interview?) but he proposes that every word is a metaphor. This, however, contrasts with the Hegemon, who sees metaphors as potential slippery-slopes to myth. Of course, Joseph Campbell sees everything as the function of a myth ... so there's that:

*"Truth is a mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, anthropomorphisms, in short, a sum of human relations which were poetically and rhetorically heightened, transferred, and adorned, and after long use seem solid, canonical, and binding to a nation. Truths are illusions about which it has been forgotten that they are illusions."* (Friedrich Nietzsche, *On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense*)

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#### Post by "Eikadistes" of April 22, 2025 at 11:49 AM

And, *not like anyone was asking* (and forgive the shameless self-promotion) but I came across this idea about Nietzsche, in particular, while writing a kind of [manifesto](#) once upon a time. It started as a songbook for my music, but eventually developed into a 30,000 essay on language and culture.

It's sort of written from a kind of post-structuralist point of view. My thesis was that everything humans produce is "*poetry*", including our maths and sciences, and everything we've ever been exposed to, whether Noah's Ark or the Big Bang, each are their own kind of "*myth*".

I also spend time reflecting on Elvish history in *Lord of the Rings* and Led Zeppelin, among other things. I take liberties. 😄 It deals a lot more with reflections on aesthetics than physics and epistemology, but, if you're interested in the Nietzsche thing, I'll stand behind what I wrote.

Ultimately, I maintain that the function of our "*poetries*" are to express ourselves as accurately as possible, and that accuracy should be a reflection of the reality of our experiences: "In writing with purpose, we commit to hydrate forgotten passions that have grown arid with age. We write to polish petrified fossils and wage an unending campaign to animate identity. We write to dismantle the many mistaken assumptions embedded within mere "*empty sounds*" (Epicurus, Letter To Herodotus) ."

The whole thing isn't *exactly* Epicurean, more of an art project, but, *still*, thought I'd share. 👍

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### Post by "Cassius" of April 22, 2025 at 1:07 PM

Eikadistes while I will bow to the common view that Nietzsche is a mixed bag, I personally very much agree that a knowledge of Nietzsche is very helpful for understanding Epicurus, and I am not just talking about his pro-Lucretius and anti-Stoic comments.

The helpfulness of Nietzsche is a view shared by [Elli](#) in Greece, who I think has internalized the intensity of Epicurran philosophy so well at least in part because of her affinity for Nietzsche and also for the Greek version of Nietzsche, Dimitri Liantini.

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### Post by "vlasalv" of April 22, 2025 at 2:19 PM

#### [Quote from Cassius](#)

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The helpfulness of Nietzsche is a view shared by [Elli](#) in Greece, who I think has internalized the intensity of Epicurran philosophy so well at least in part because of her affinity for Nietzsche and also for the Greek version of Nietzsche, Dimitri Liantini.

Can we say then that "one cannot understand Nietzsche without understanding Epicurus"? I would see a hidden loop in there, though a failed one.

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## Post by “Cassius” of April 22, 2025 at 2:52 PM

### [Quote from vlasalv](#)

Can we say then that "one cannot understand Nietzsche without understanding Epicurus"?

Well I wouldn't go that far. No doubt understanding how subtle Epicurus can be would help understanding Nietzsche to some degree, but Nietzsche sure didn't approach the idea of "clarity" the way Epicurus did.

So I'm not sure that it's a good idea to look at Epicurus as a prerequisite to Nietzsche. At first thought I tend to I think the main issue is the common devotion to "this world" and to the intensity of warfare against "otherworlders." Nietzsche's "AntiChrist" to me is a good example of that, and of course that's one of Nietzsche's most clear commendations of Lucretius.

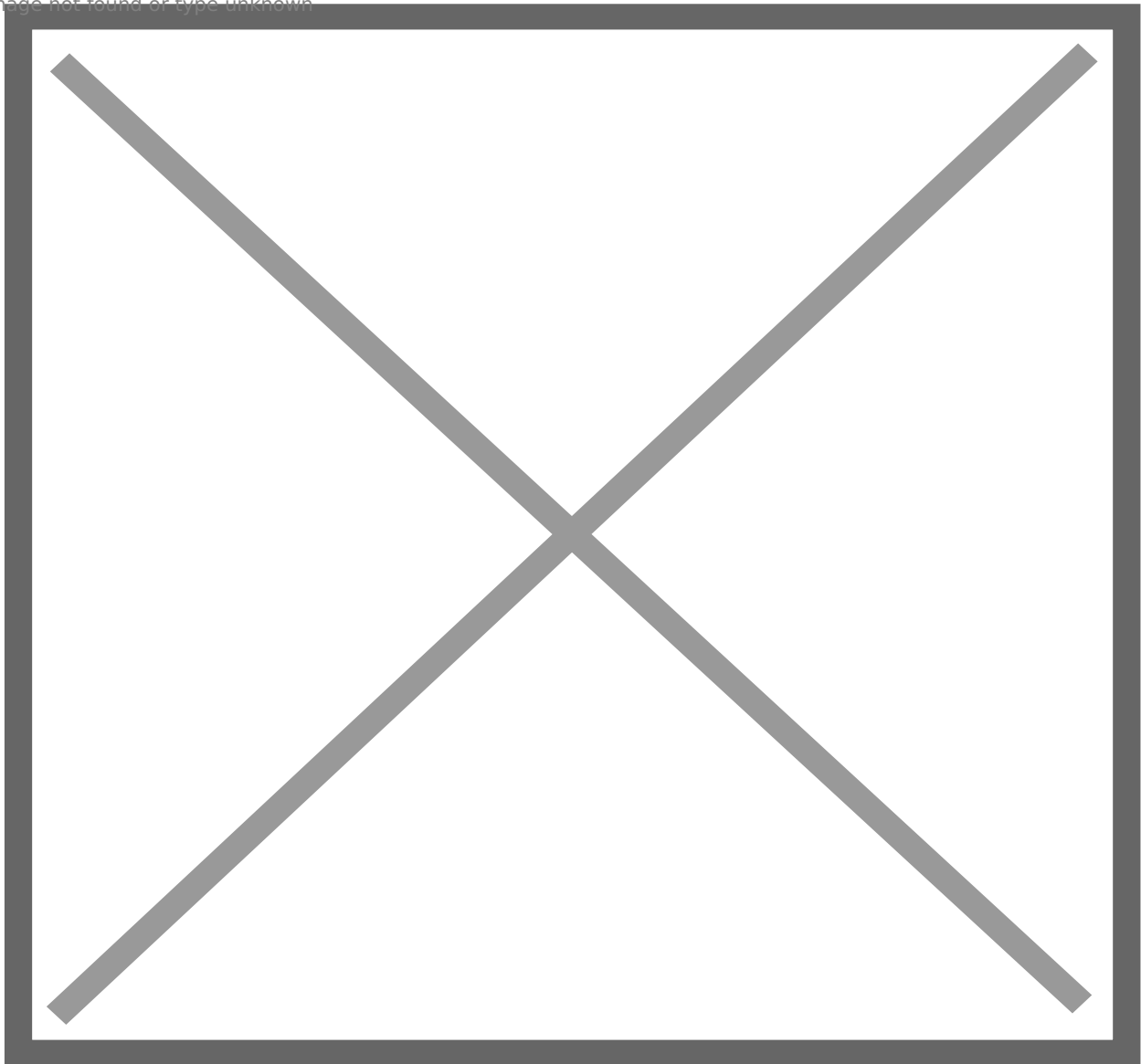
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## Post by “Elli” of April 26, 2025 at 6:04 PM

Greetings to all epicurean friends, 🥰

Nietzsche is ultimately contradictory in many aspects with all philosophers. While in other works he speaks very highly of Epicurus, in his work "*The Antichrist*" he characterizes Epicurus as "decadent". However, Liantinis did not agree with Nietzsche on this point at all. Here, in this Facebook post, I respond to Nietzsche with a letter as if it were written to him by Epicurus. 😊

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[Epicurean Philosophy | A letter with a response to Nietzsche for his characterization against Epicurus as decadent, in his book entitled "Antichrist": | Facebook](#)

A letter with a response to Nietzsche for his characterization against Epicurus as decadent, in his book entitled "Antichrist": Epicurus to Nietzsche...

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